

Why Italian planning is worth studying

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ABSTRACT

Italian planning seems to be underestimated outside Italy and the cause for this is unclear. There may be two possible explanations. On the one hand, it could be argued that Italian planning is ignored internationally as the consequence of a lack or of a small number of international articles about it published in international journals. On the other hand, it may be the perception that international scholars have of it, which in part depends on the articles published, but which means that there have been few attempts to spread knowledge concerning the practice of planning in Italy. This article provides a brief account of the development of Italian planning over time and seeks to emphasise the peculiarities of the discipline in Italy and to discuss what areas of study offer the best potentials for further studies either on a comparative basis with other countries or Italy-focused.

INTRODUCTION

Italian planning is a strange object. On the one hand, the need to manage some of the most important, if not the most important areas of world cultural heritage, with universally recognized environmental and landscape values. On the other hand, there is instead a system of physical development, based on an antiquated law, that has been the general framework for planning for nearly seventy years. The institutional level within which urban planning works is particularly fragile. This is because the planning legislation currently in force finds its application in eight thousand municipalities which range in population size from a few tens to millions of inhabitants (Hine, 1993).

In this institutional framework, in the second half of the twentieth century, Italy has faced momentous changes that have seen it transform from a predominantly agricultural country to one based on industrial and services sectors. So in a few decades a profound transformation took place whereas, in other European countries, these changes had taken place over a much longer timescale. The transformation, however, took place in a “low trust” society where familial phenomena and "patronage" have permeated the management of the common good, especially at the local level (Giordano, 2006). Further complicating the picture, this kind of “privatization” of the "common good" has taken different forms in the country. The relatively recent unification of Italy (1861) determined the merging of states between which the nature of social and economic relations was profoundly different. Thus the forms of appropriation for the common good in the south had a somewhat different form to those of the centre and north. The south has inherited political relations characterised by forms of patronage which were inherited from a feudal structure that then has adapted to all attempts of modernisation. Within this context dark networks of organised crime have played an important role and affected all aspects of social and political life, including that of urban planning. Different situations characterised the centre and north of the country where the phenomena that characterise a low trust

society have been overcome by means of a long tradition of civic structures that sometimes have their roots in medieval-type society. Obviously urban planning has also been influenced by this context.

Regional decentralization, which started in the 1970s, has had good results for planning. Regions in the north and centre have sometimes been able to produce planning tools and applications of great interest, even if their application is not national. Within this framework, the question of whether Italian planning practice is worthy of study by foreign scholars finds positive answers, for a number of different reasons. The first and most obvious is that urban, environmental and landscape planning in Italy is certain to influence world heritage sites of great historical, cultural and landscape value. The second reason, from a disciplinary point of view, is that examples of excellent practice can provide useful information for non-Italian scholars. This will include experiences of conservation and enhancement of historic centres. A third area concerns the negative situations found in a low-trust society. Many scholars have used the Italian experience as a paradigmatic example of a low-trust society (Giordano, 2006; Chubb, 1982). In these studies, planning issues are important aspects of those mechanisms. Surprisingly, however, these studies have been conducted by scholars from different disciplines while planning scholars seem to neglect them.

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate how the Italian case, through the analysis of planning practices, may provide useful elements for the international disciplinary debate, especially in Europe. The paper therefore consists of three sections. Firstly, there will be a discussion on the perception of Italian planning in the international literature in order to understand why and how much our planning is under-represented. Secondly, the basic steps in the development of Italian planning are introduced in order to provide the basic background for possible international contributions. Finally, the arguments for in-depth comparative analyses of planning practices are highlighted, so as to help overcome a position of isolation in which Italian planning currently finds itself.

1. PERCEPTION OF ITALIAN PLANNING

We can distinguish three stages in the perception of the importance of Italian planning in Europe and especially in Britain, that for most of the last century was considered as the more frequent and prestigious reference: from the beginning of the century to the 1950s, from the early 1960s to the mid '80s and from then until now.

In fact, in the first half of the twentieth century, urban planning in Italy received considerable attention. In 1915, one of the first works on planning stated (Alteridge, 1915 p.1):

"The Italian method of obtaining both urban and suburban comprehensive road and street planning, including street widening, land for public gardens and squares, etc, may be summed up roughly in a few sentences:- Corporations and landowners, usually in friendly co-operation, prepare comprehensive road-schemes to permit orderly growth of the city in every direction. Owners are paid for all land and property taken. Compensation is assessed at the value the property and land has when taken, quite apart from any value given to it by either the proposed or executed works. (...) Opposition does not appear even to be formidable. Mutual cooperation between owners and communal council is the general rule. (...) Italian town planning is not optional, but in practice compulsory for urban communities of more than 10,000 people".

The perception then was that of a planning system, well-handled by the government, which was capable of establishing profitable relationship with private developers. The nineteenth-century model, where the public is investing in major infrastructures (roads and squares) and makes provision for private housing development, worked well in Italy, albeit with far more limited resources than could be invested than those in the wealthier European countries like France and Britain (Benevolo, 1973).

For many decades the British journal "Town Planning Review", published

by the Department of Civic Design in the University of Liverpool, was perhaps the only, certainly the most prestigious, source for information on urban planning. Italy is very present in the first decades of the journal's life. Within the Review, Italian planning is frequently cited and positive emphasis is placed upon it. Articles by Luigi Lenzi (1928, 1929, 1930, 1931) help to make known the contents of the main city plans; these were often the result of competitions between national planners.

The experience of the new towns which were founded in the fascist period is considered an interesting experiment, consistent with emerging theories about New Towns. The Congress of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning, held in Rome in 1929, was a substantial recognition of the Italian planners' active role. Moreover, it is interesting to note that this perception escapes preconceived political judgments on the fascist regime. The foundation of the National Institute of Urban Planning (INU) in 1930 is a direct consequence of that event and therefore it is included in the international context. The focus was not confined to the "Roman" school that dominated INU but extended to some interesting experiences such as the Milan Plan (Chiodi, 1926).

Following this trend, in the period after World War II, the interest in Italian planning is dominated by attention to the Adriano Olivetti Community Movement (Figure 1). Urban planning has a fundamental role within Olivetti's thinking. Olivetti himself, at the time president of the INU, placed great importance on international relations with the most advanced international planning experiences. The article of 1952 by Giovanni Astengo, grown in the Olivetti school, is an interesting overview of the limits but also of the hopes of Italian planning. The beginning of that article, addressed to the foreign reader, provides the motivations and methods for the study of Italian planning that, at present, still retain their validity.



Figure 1 – Adriano Olivetti (Source: *Urbanistica*, 30, 1990).

A general picture of town planning in Italy must be seen in the particular atmosphere which has developed since the war; and must be introduced by a reference, however brief, to town planning activity as it was carried out in this country during the decade preceding the war. Without this, the foreign observer, examining aspects of present activity, might either form too optimistic an opinion by considering isolated achievements, or a pessimistic one by judging only from the official results of plans. In either case he would lose sight of the significance of the slow and difficult process which was clarifying and transforming town planning in Italy; and for the foreign observer, who is in a position to make comparisons with other countries, this is certainly its most interesting and striking aspect. With Olivetti passing away, however, Italian planning lost any form of appeal to the eyes of non-Italian planning scholars. The figure of Olivetti was important in the international context, and perhaps even more so than in Italy. In announcing his death, the editorial in the *Town Planning Review*, written by Paolo Radogna, a student of the Department of Civic Design, underlines the sense of Olivetti's message and his role within Italian planning:

"For Olivetti, (planning) was no mere technical exercise; he saw it as

an essential part of a unified whole which embraced industrial, social, political and cultural problems" (Radogna, 1960).

After Olivetti, Italian planning is no longer a landmark of interest to the international planning scene. The phenomenon of urbanisation, with the massive urban migration of millions of Italians from rural to urban areas, was dealt with without appropriate planning instruments (Scattoni, 2004), and finds no attention within international planning literature. However the phenomenon was investigated by scholars from other disciplines, especially from the political viewpoint. The most important study on the preparation of an urban plan in Italy was carried out by John Fried (1973), who sees in the arduous preparation process of Rome Plan of 1965, a significant case to explain the nature of Italian politics at the local level.

Even the establishment of regional governments, which were surely to have considerable influence on the enforcement of the 1942 Planning Act, had different results in the southern regions compared with those achieved in the north and centre. But this was not analysed within the international literature except for rare exceptions (e.g. Scattoni and Williams, 1978; Scattoni, 1979). The renewed interest in the Italian planning since the mid '80s is certainly due to the emergence of the European dimension and the needs for comparative planning research. European student exchange programmes and faculty and research funding contributed to this new phase. In fact, Williams' contribution (1984) was followed by other studies of importance.

These studies, however, have not been able to provide a meaningful and coherent view of Italian planning and they throw little light on the way it can help contribute to the European and international levels. In this third phase we can distinguish two different disciplinary approaches. After Fried's contribution (1973), political scientists continue to regard the study of the planning discipline, especially in the southern regions, as a way to explain the degeneration of politics at the local level. This is the case with articles by Judith Chubb (1981) and Percy Allum (2003). The latter is a study of contemporary Italian politics. Different, instead, the contributions coming from planning scholars (e.g. Astengo, 1952). Publications in English concern

partial elements in various disciplinary fields which do not allow for an overall understanding and judgment of Italian planning. On this element, the cited article by Astengo remains valid.

2. THE ORIGINS

This part of the paper aims to give an account of planning legislation in order to provide the reader with the very basic knowledge to the evolution of the Italian Planning System. The Italian Nation was unified in 1861 from a number of separate states. Four years later, acts were passed introducing planning and building regulations. These new tools were mainly seen in relation to the acquisition of land through compulsory purchase for public infrastructures. Railways, roads, ports and channels were the main objectives but, at the local level, land for urban development was necessary. The planning tools introduced were: Piano di Ampliamento, Piano Regolatore Edilizio and Regolamento Edilizio. The Piano di Ampliamento was a plan to organise centres with over 2,000 inhabitants. The Piano Regolatore Edilizio allowed the reorganisation of existing built-up centres. The Regolamento Edilizio was related to aesthetic, sanitation, safety and habitability aspects of buildings and was obligatory for all Municipalities.

The 1865 legislation produced some impact on the preparation of plans for the major cities. By 1932 very few plans were approved. Ten years later the number of Communes with an approved plan was less than one hundred, with some Communes having prepared more than one plan. The Act no. 2359 of 1865 represented a stimulus for many Communes to build up some form of Town Planning. In particular the Regolamento Edilizio could be accompanied by a more or less detailed map showing the areas (built or to be developed) to which the regulations applied. These maps represented a crude but frequent form of Town planning and in the subsequent legislation they were formally introduced as "Programma di Fabbricazione".

During the Fascist period, Town and Country Planning consolidated in different directions. Firstly there were a series of different special Acts relating to subjects associated with planning (eg. forestry conservation,

landscape protection, etc.). Secondly the planning profession was in some way recognised and the professional Institute was founded. Thirdly, planning education had some recognition within the University system. Finally a fundamental planning reform was introduced. In addition to this, a programme of "new towns" was introduced by the regime. The innovations introduced by the Fascist Government were considered sound and advanced experiences by European planners. There was an analogy between the so called "anti-urban ideology" of the Fascist regime and the idealistic anti-urban movements like that of the garden cities in Great Britain". Anyway Italian planners looked at the foreign experiences and mainly to the British one, as a possible source of inspiration for reform. In 1929 the Conference of International Federation of Housing and Town Planning took place in Rome. The subjects of the Conference were: Re-planning Old and Historic Towns to Meet Modern Conditions and Methods of Planning for the Expansion of Towns with Special Reference to Old and Historic Towns. In Italy, these two subjects were then strictly related to the two types of plans, Piano Regolatore Edilizio and Piano di Ampliamento.

The Fascist regime encouraged the development of Town Planning in all its aspects. The strategy of the Government was that of containing urban growth, mainly for ideological reasons. Fascist propaganda tended to praise the rural life as the bearer of the National spirit. One year after the above-mentioned congress of the International Federation of Housing and Town Planning, and using the remaining funds for its organization, the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (INU) was founded. The Institute aimed at the spread of planning as a profession. On the other hand, planning education was delivered within university schools of Architecture and Civil Engineering and mainly on the basis of activities left to private consultants.

2.1. THE NEW PLANNING LEGISLATION

The action of the INU and those factions of the Fascist Party more sensitive towards planning brought in the Town Planning Act no. 1150 of 1942. The fact that the regime was at that time rapidly reaching its end, was the most likely cause of this innovative legislation; being close to collapse, the regime

could overcome the opposition from the interests of land speculators, which in the past had influenced these matters.

The Town Planning Act addressed some of the problems encountered with the previous legislation of 1865:

1. There was to be the possibility of differentiating between the Piano Regolatore, as a general scheme, and detailed plans, which were to be prepared subsequently. Such a principle had been already introduced in the special Act for the Town Plan of Rome of 1931.
2. The Town Plan must include the whole Municipality and not separate parts of it.
3. Planning should take into consideration the regional and inter-municipal dimensions; the previous legislation did not take these into proper consideration.
4. The need for conservation and protection of historical values, as well as a whole set of relations between architecture and urban spaces, which in those years had started to be recognised as an important element of planning.
5. The possibility of acquiring large areas of land, both in order to provide the Municipality with the necessary areas for public services and also to limit speculation in situations of excessive demand. Again this principle had been already expressed by Calza Bini in the Parliamentary speech for the Act for the 1931 Rome Plan.

2.2. THE PLANNING SYSTEM AFTER THE TOWN PLANNING ACT OF 1942

The Act introduced a hierarchical system of plans, organised into three levels. The first planning level was represented by the "Piano Territoriale di Coordinamento" (PTC). Its aim was to provide a framework for large areas for new large scale industry or for large residential developments. Furthermore the PTC should provide the proper framework for large new infrastructures like roads, rail and electric lines. The PTC did not go beyond physical planning and, in the mind of the legislators, it was only a tool to orientate local decisions towards the strategic plans of the Central Government. In this general framework, the policy of New Towns, started a

few years before, could have been properly organised. Afterwards the PTC was applied in a much wider sense, including social and economic aspects. The spatial coverage of the plan was not explicitly mentioned in the Act, but it was generally assumed to be regional.

The second level of the planning system was the Municipal plan, called the "Piano Regolatore Generale" (PRG). The characteristics of this plan are the following:

1. It covers the whole Municipality;
2. It establishes the main road network and land zoning, including areas for residences, industry, services and so on;
3. It establishes the main protections for landscape, environmental or historic values (integrating with those established by the Central Government);
4. It should also include detailed regulations for implementation of the plan, called "Norme di Attuazione".

The PRG should conform to the PTC when this exists. It does not have a time limit and any changes to it follow the same procedure as for its approval. The preparation of the PRG was optional, except for the Communes included in special lists published by the Ministry of Public Works.

The third level of planning introduced by the Act no. 1150/42 related to detailed planning: "Piani Particolareggiati". They were to be prepared by the Municipality and to have a validity limited to ten years. During this period the municipality had to expropriate the land and implement the plan; failure to implement could allow the previous owner to claim back land which had been expropriated. Exceptionally the Municipality could give private land owners the possibility of implementing the plan themselves with a "lottizzazione" (parcellation) in which all the details of the works for infrastructures, housing and public services must be agreed. As will be seen later, this possibility became the Trojan Horse for a practice completely different from the intentions of the Act no. 1150/42. There is no doubt that the new legislation was a very advanced result of a long period of pressure for Town Planning Reform. In theory, the totality of land could be planned

by the Commune, under the strict control of the Central Government. The fact that only some Communes were obliged to prepare a PRG was in some way balanced with an important improvement of the Regolamento Edilizio. As an alternative to the Piano Regolatore, smaller and less important Communes had to prepare a simpler planning tool called "Programma di Fabbricazione" (PdF). The PdF, as set out in the Act no. 1150, was only a map attached to the Regolamento Edilizio showing the direction of expansion of the urban centres.

The approval of PRGs and Detailed plans was a complex procedure. As far as a PRG was concerned there were several steps to be followed. After the preparation of the Plan by a qualified planner (Architect or Engineer) it was "adopted" by the Municipal Council. Subsequently the plan was published and then organisations and individuals can make their "osservazioni" (representations) and propose changes. The representations should be based on the "public interest" and avoid any personal or particular defence of private property. The Council must respond to all the representations, either accepting or rejecting the proposed modifications. The Council decisions are called "controdeduzioni" (counter-deductions). The plan, together with the representations, is then submitted to the Ministry of Public Works. If evaluated positively, a Presidential Decree (with the same value as an Act of Parliament) was issued and the Plan was definitively approved. In the case that the enquiries at local or central level are negative, the Plan could be rejected entirely or modifications could be proposed and be subject to a new decision of the Municipal Council.

2.3. PROSPECTS FOR PLANNING IN POST-WAR ITALY...

After World War II the Italian legislative situation was undoubtedly positive towards planning. There had been major legislation reforms giving to the Communes substantial powers for preparing comprehensive physical plans and there was parallel legislation about subjects related to planning, consolidated in the 1920s and 1930s.

At central level, the Ministry of Public Works had started to organise a

proper structure for planning controls and peripheral offices of the Ministry itself were able to provide reasonable support to the implementation of the Town Planning Act of 1942. Also, Planning education had started, with postgraduate courses not too dissimilar to planning courses in the economically most advanced countries in Europe. The recognition of INU could be the first step for establishing a planning profession in the same way as the British Town Planning Institute. Planning experience in Italy was not negligible. From 1865, with the Town Plan for Florence (Figure 2), up to the most recent "Piano Regolatore" for Milan and for Rome in 1928 and 1932, there existed a solid base for a more generalised approach. Also the new towns, created by the Fascist Regime (Figure 3), were important pioneering experiences at that time, even though their impact was vitiated by their reactionary ideological content.



Figure 2 – Project for Piazza della Libertá, Florence (Source: *Urbanistica*, 12, 1953).

It could be argued that most of the Planning legislation available immediately after World War II had been strongly influenced by the anti-urban ideology of Fascism. On the contrary, the new political ideologies, in the new democratic state, advocated a Nation based on industry and therefore on a mainly urban society. The Town Planning Act of 1942 and the planning machinery already established could have been used to control the processes of urbanisation that the new situation necessarily required. The efforts of the promoters of the Planning Act of 1942 to learn from other countries must be recognised; their model now was probably British, while the French experience had inspired the earlier post-Unification planning laws.



Figure 3 – Sabaudia: aerial view of the City Council Park (Source: Marconi, 1936).

2.4 ...AND THE POST WAR PLANNING POLICY

In practice, the 1942 Planning Act was abandoned for several years. In 1945 the provisional all-party Government decided to issue a series of Acts which allowed the Communes to proceed to reconstruction without taking into consideration the 1942 Planning Act. The Decree no. 154 introduced the "reconstruction town plan". The declared intention was that of introducing the necessary modifications to the old urban pattern in order to improve urban conditions. As technical documents, the "reconstruction plans" were very poor. The approval procedures were quick and limited and, therefore, very often the results were unsatisfactory. The Italian solution chosen for the reconstruction problem was the opposite of the British solution; in Italy the reformed planning system was abandoned whilst in Britain a new radical reform was introduced. In fact, the Town Planning Act no. 1150/1942 was implemented again only in 1954 with the publication of the first list of the Communes obliged to prepare the PRG. This delay coincided with a period of large scale growth of the building sector. Benevolo (1973) attributed the decision to abandon the Reform to an overestimate of the war damages. According to this interpretation, the post-war all-party coalition Government, and above all the leaders of the Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democratic Party (DC), considered the Planning Act to be an obstacle to the huge works needed for reconstruction. No precise data about the extent of damage have been produced. It is nowadays generally accepted

that they were important but not as catastrophic as originally estimated. A reasonable estimate is that around 17% of the residential stock was damaged, of which 6% was completely lost (Figure 4). A comparable percentage of losses affected industry. Even though the data support Benevolo's interpretation, the political misjudgement is probably a simplistic idea.

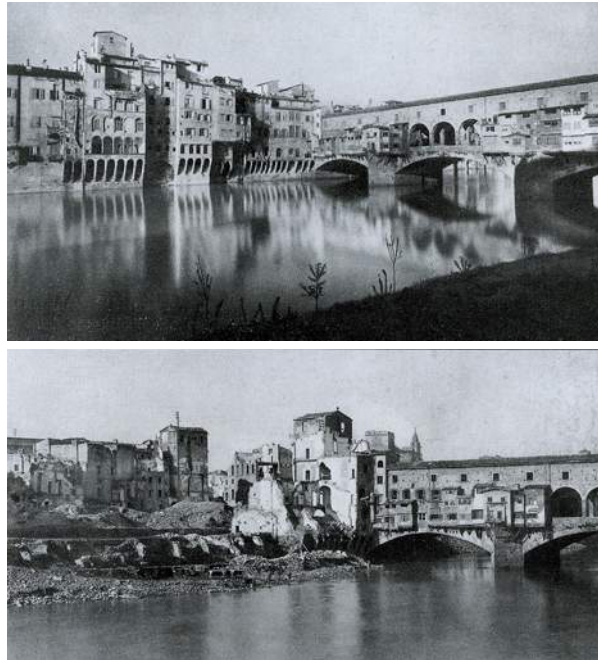


Figure 4 – Florence, Ponte vecchio before and after war damage in World War II (Source: Urbanistica, 12, 1953).

Other authors (Scattoni, 2004) have put forward the hypothesis that the abandonment of the Planning Act of 1942 was mainly due to a more general strategy for the Italian economy. The building sector was seen as the main economic regulator for the whole economic system. Firstly the building sector did not require highly specialised manpower and was ideal to reconvert those moving from the rural sector. On the other hand the Central Government could have a certain degree of control through public housing, which at the time was carried out by Governmental Agencies. Therefore housing became a privileged sector for the intervention of the State in the Keynesian view of the economy, because it was found that building activity

could induce development in many sectors of industry (Figure 5). All this was supported by huge housing deficit. On the other hand the demand was inflated by industrial development itself, attracting more and more manpower from the country into industrialised metropolitan areas. Bardazzi (1984) has shown the close correlation between post-war planning legislation and the trends of the building industry. The conclusion is that the real aim of planning legislation was to support the building industry more than setting up an efficient planning system.



Figure 5 – Low-tech building sector: Engine of economic growth (Source: Camerini et al, 2000).

2.5. THE PLANNING PROFESSION AND ATTEMPTS AT LAND REFORM

Only the planning profession tried to oppose the strategy of the national government which had the support of all political parties. The INU

reinforced its organisation and called for a new planning system. In the 1960s the INU used its prestige and influence in order to obtain a planning reform and new legislation for public ownership of urban land. During the seventies there is, on the one hand, the big innovation of the devolution of planning powers to the Regions and, on the other hand, the attempt to improve the existing planning laws. The idea of a new general reform was abandoned, but at the same time it was thought possible to introduce modifications to the Planning Act of 1942, in order to make possible the public control of the development processes. In 1962 the new Minister of Public Works, Fiorentino Sullo, another left-wing Christian Democrat, with the direct collaboration of INU's most prominent members, prepared a new, more comprehensive Bill for a general planning and urban land reform (Sullo, 1964). This was to require prior public ownership of land before any development could take place. The expropriation costs were based on the agricultural value of the land if it related to expansion areas and with some correction for those ones to be included in existing built-up zones.

This radical Bill faced strong opposition from a great number of land owners and landlords. The right wing parties opposed the proposal on the grounds that it would have introduced a sort of collective socialist society. This became one of the main issues of the 1963 General Election. The DC lost one million votes of frightened small land owners. Sullo was not made Minister of Public Works in the new Cabinet, and his political fortune started to decline. Also the alliance between the INU and the progressive sectors of the centre-left coalition parties came to an end. The only inheritance from the first centre-left battle for land reform was the Public Housing Act of 1962, which introduced specific regulations for developing public housing and low cost housing schemes. However, this Act remained largely unapplied, lacking the support of a more general Land Reform which is still to come.

2.6 THE PRACTICE OF PLANNING IN THE 1950S AND 1960S

The practice of planning during the 1950s and 1960s was in marked contrast with the very advanced theoretical and political debate. The lists of

Communes compelled to prepare a Piano Regolatore Generale were published between 1954 and 1960. This list included all the major towns and most of the small ones with special environmental and historical values. But by 1967 very few had adopted a plan and even fewer had an approved one. The delays in plan preparation were generally attributed by planners to the weaknesses of the Planning Act of 1942 and to the obstacles posed by the consolidated interests of land speculation. No reference was made to the political system at local level. There is no systematic literature on the planning practice of this period in relation to urban development and only a crude idea of the system can be given through the partial literature available.

One relevant exception is a Ministry enquiry report on the practice by Municipalities of replacing proper planning with parcellations, prepared by land owners for new residential settlements and tourist resorts. In theory such a practice was not allowed by the Planning Act of 1942. Parcellation could be done only in the presence of a Detailed Plan. In practice this never happened. The parcellations were approved by the mayors of communes on the basis of "exceptional conditions" which in fact became the norm. In 1968 the Ministry of Public Works published the results of an enquiry carried out on all the Italian Communes. The results showed how frequent the use of the parcellation was. In total, the parcellations potentially contained 18 million new rooms, of which one and a half million were for tourist resorts. Very few Municipalities had an approved plan and therefore there was no legal or theoretical justification to proceed with such a practice.

As far as the quantitative aspect was concerned the enquiry of the Ministry concluded:

"(...) in general the parcellations are not at all integrated into a planning context. On the contrary in most cases (parcellations) replaced the planning tools to be prepared by the Communes. They could avoid the control of the Local Representative Councils and that of the Control Authorities. In fact they jeopardised the possibility for an integrated urban development on a large part of the National territory. Only 21.84% of the volume of the studied parcellations was disciplined by a planning tool and conforming to it".

2.7 THE "BRIDGE" PLANNING ACT OF 1967

Once it was clear that political obstacles would not have allowed a drastic planning reform, the Ministry of Public Works decided to issue temporary measures in order to make a stop to the most evident planning illegalities of the Communes. Therefore in 1967, the Planning Act No. 765, was enacted. This Act is also known as the "Bridge Planning Act" as it was the intention of the Ministry that the Act should work as a "bridge" between the Planning Act of 1942 and the expected new reform, which in fact has never taken place.

However the Bridge Act introduced fundamental innovations. Firstly, precise deadlines were set up for the preparation of the PRG or the Programma di Fabbricazione by the Communes. In a case where the Commune could not meet the deadline, the Central Government could prepare the plan instead. In the approval phase, the Ministry could introduce changes without asking the Commune. The Mayor could not approve parcellation plans in the absence of an approved plan and precise ratios and standards were fixed in order to regulate heights and volumes of buildings and to provide land for open space and public facilities. Furthermore the abuses – that is the illegal developments - were to be punished more severely. Undoubtedly this Act was a big step forward. It implicitly assumed that a Commune might not be interested in having a town plan whilst the Act of 1942 idealistically assumed that the Communes would have conformed "naturally" to the law. There is no definitive study of the impact of the Bridge Act. Certainly the Central Government did not proceed to substitute Communes in plan preparation at a significant scale. On the other hand the Communes could find ways to delay plan preparation and in any case, only three years later, the control powers were transferred from the Ministry to the new Regional authorities. The Bridge Act introduced the innovation of minimum standards for open space, schools, parking and public facilities. These standards are a guideline for new plans and for the updating of the old ones. Furthermore they are a guideline for the newly introduced Detailed Plans, to be prepared by private landowners, called "Piani di Lottizzazione Convenzionata".

Because the buildable volumes were already indicated by the PRG, the two parties had to agree on the investment share for the cost of the public facilities to be built. The standards were calculated per resident.

2.8 THE NEW PLANNING LEGISLATION AND REGIONAL DEVOLUTION IN THE 1970s

The 1970s were characterised by numerous attempts to reform the planning system through separate and innovative laws. Two of the most important were passed in 1971 and 1977 when the value of urban land for public expropriation was to be based on the agricultural value. However, the laws did not remain in force for very long since they were declared unlawful by a ruling of the national Constitutional Court in 1980. Also worthy of mention is the Act n. 457/1978 which strongly encouraged and favoured conservation and regeneration of the existing housing stock and, at the same, limiting urban expansion on greenfield sites.

As far as planning is concerned, the Regions created a structure similar to that of the Ministry with technical committees established to replace the Consiglio Superiore dei Lavori Pubblici. Such Committees were to provide technical opinions about planning and regional projects. They were generally made up of some internal officers, along with external consultants. The original planning powers were then enriched by other powers devolved to the regions by the national Parliament. During the first years of life of the Regions, an all-party movement started pressures for greater autonomy for the Regions. Such a lobby was successful in passing an Act in 1975 (No. 32) and a Presidential Decree in 1977 (No. 616) according to which a great number of powers were devolved mainly to the Regions, but also to Provinces and Communes. These included planning-related powers like landscape control and environmental conservation control, which were passed to the Regions. Peripheral governmental offices like the Soprintendenza lost most of their influence.

The proliferation of Regional Acts, for each Region, and their uncoordinated actions does not allow an overall evaluation. This means that a clear

difference, compared to the previous situation, is the loss of a comprehensive view of Italian planning. The analysis carried out by the Ministry of Public Works after Regional devolution never reached the completeness of the pre-devolution period. Nevertheless some changes from the previous period were visible. Firstly the number of plans approved increased dramatically. Such an achievement can be attributed to several causes. There is no doubt that the first years of life of the Regions were characterised by enthusiasm. The politicians wanted to show that the new institution functioned more efficiently than the slow administrative machinery of the Central Government and plan approval was one of the most obvious sectors for comparison. Another important factor was the simplification and sometimes elimination of administrative controls exerted on the Communes by the Prefectures on behalf of Central Government. Such formal controls could delay any of the administrative steps for months. On the other hand there were other possible elements which could have speeded up the planning processes, which were never taken into consideration. The "Bridge" Planning Act of 1967 probably started having its effects in the early 1970s. The limitations to development imposed by the Act must have convinced reluctant Communes to prepare and adopt a PRG. A final unstudied factor could have been a certain relaxation of the quality requirements for the plans, i.e. the Ministry may have required more than the Regions.

A second important difference between pre- and post-regional reform was a different attitude towards devolution. Whilst the Ministry was really unwilling to decentralise its powers, the Regions tended to transfer most of their control functions to the Communes. Most of the Regions devolved their powers of landscape control, obtained in the 1977 Act, either directly to the Communes or to some inter-communal associations established under Regional legislation. More recently most of the controls on detailed plans have also been given to the Communes. Therefore, the functions of plan making and planning control coincided. In most cases the only form of control remained that of PRG approval.

Such a policy was justified on the grounds that devolution was, per se, a

positive process in opposition to centralised bureaucracy of any form. There is no extensive research on how the quality of planning and of development control was affected by such a process. The decentralisation from Regions to Communes diminished greatly the possibility of a general overview of the planning situation of the whole Region, just as a few years before when Regional reform removed such a possibility at the national level.

On the other hand, in the '80s, there were attempts of a substantial deregulation in planning. The most important step towards deregulation was the so called "building condono" through a specific act (47/1985). This Act concerned past abuses. Those owners possessing a building which did not correspond to the planning tools at the time they were built (PRG, PdF or Regolamento Edilizio) could regularise it by paying a fine in relation to the size of the abuse and the time it was committed (Figure 6). This would cancel also any penal consequence for the owner. Officially, the two main reasons for the Act were to allow some order into the matter of planning abuses and to give the possibility of restarting a more effective development control. On the other side there was the possibility of revenue to finance part of the Central Government's deficit. The forgiveness of planning sins can be seen in the long tradition of the "seller of indulgences" for which Rome became famous in the past; the obvious and strong opposition by INU and conservationist groups could not stop the Act.



Figure 6 – Example of illegal development (Source: Clementi and Perego, 1983).

2.9 THE INNOVATIVE REGIONAL ACTION IN THE LATE 1990S AND EARLY 2000s

In 2001 an important constitutional reform was passed. The reform produced a profound institutional change relating to legislative competence over certain matters, including planning. The subdivision of legislative competences is based upon a simple principle which identifies matters of absolute national or regional competence and matters which are defined as shared, where both the state and regions have powers to legislate. In the latter case, the reformed articles prescribe that the State should set out the basic and guiding principles for the matter while the regions are responsible for the specific regulations relating to their specific areas and contexts. Planning came into this category, thus making the need for a new national planning Act even more urgent. Within such a general framework, the regions have sought to overcome the new challenges and meet the needs of their populations by legislating and making new regional planning laws, generally defined in the planning debate as “second generation” laws.

The first region to reform its planning system was Tuscany in 1995. The regional Act n.5 introduced a new planning machinery, based on the system favoured at that time by the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica. The new system introduced different planning documents where the master plan is to be formed by two different documents, the Piano Strutturale (structure plan), with the aims of setting out the general strategy and vision for the city, and the Regolamento Urbanistico (development plan) which is to determine and identify development areas, to be developed within a five-year time period (Oliva, 2006). An important objective to be achieved through the new planning system, that emerged both from the national debate and implicitly from the new regional system, was the speeding-up of the planning process. At present half of the Italian regions have followed the experience of the Tuscany and have introduced new acts and planning systems. Many others are working on the reform process and have it currently underway (Falco, 2010).

SUMMARISING REMARKS

The concise history of Italian planning outlined in this paper has showed the level of planning legislation in relation to planning practice. The origins of modern Italian town planning are almost contemporary with those of other industrialised European countries. Planning was considered an essential tool for controlling urban development. The progress before World War II was internationally recognised. Planning education was also in line with the developments of other countries. Despite the economic backwardness of Italy, entering into the industrial revolution almost one century late, the disciplinary and legislative system for the post-war period were satisfactory. Nevertheless, the 1950s saw the practical abandonment of planning practice, even though the theory was still developing, mainly through the contribution of the Community movement led by Adriano Olivetti. The planning crisis has been explained firstly by an overemphasis on the need for reconstruction, and later by the strategic role of the building industry as the main economic regulator. Both these aspects required some relaxation of planning constraints.

Obstacles to planning remained, even when the economic development of the country made these conditions obsolete. At this point all the existing explanations of the situation become partial and largely unsatisfactory and a clear gap exists in Italian planning research. There are indications that an 'anti-planning' attitude grew up within local political systems. On the other hand, planning legislation continued to develop in the 1970s, reaching high levels of sophistication but the impact on practice was not as great as expected. Finally the practical behaviour of the Regions since the late 1970s and the subsequent national legislation have started a process of deregulation which consolidated the anti-planning attitude already evident in development practice.

The 1980s and 1990s nowadays represent an important stage in the history of planning. During the eighties, the first and most important form of

deregulation was allowed by the State. With a specific national Act (n. 47/1985) all the private developments developed illegally as not complying with the law and with planning regulations were allowed to be regularised through a simple procedure called condono edilizio (where subject to the payment of a sum of money (a fine) the development was declared lawful and the administrative and penal consequences for the owner were cancelled).

As concerns the 1990s, in this period a major and most interesting feature has been the growing participation of private sector investors and stakeholders in the planning process. Participation, in the decision-making process as well as in the implementation phase, has followed from the lack of financial resources available to public administrations and therefore the need to involve private stakeholders to bring forward development proposals has been increasingly high. As a consequence of this situation, several local tools and plans and forms of public-private partnerships have been introduced within the national legislation. Over the years the role of these tools has grown increasingly important in the delivery of planning objectives.

AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Within the above described framework, Italian planning shows the potential for further studies and different interpretations for Italian as well as non-Italian academics and professionals. The role of the “Italian Journal of Planning Practice” is that of gathering research on Italian planning from both scholars and professionals in order to further contribute to the international planning debate through the Italian experience; trying in this way to place more emphasis on Italian planning which is perhaps currently internationally underrepresented.

It could be argued that there are several areas worthy of study which could be of great interest. Firstly, there is the well-known area of heritage protection and conservation and the planning for the historic heritage which,

given the historical nature of Italian cities, provides a considerable bulk of work where Italy is at the forefront. International comparisons with Italian practice should prove to be stimulating, especially when we are entering an era of reduced resources.

Secondly, there is the whole area of environmental and landscape planning. Landscape protection and planning, being one of the main problematic areas which does not receive proper treatment in Italy, offers exciting new prospects for study and is open to international contributions. Similarly, environmental planning and management represents another important field of great interest and of vital importance for the future of our cities to which comparative research can positively contribute.

Last but not least, there remains a research area which focuses on the impact on the planning system of outdated social structures and relationships, in which criminality plays an important role. On this subject important academics have based their studies (such as Judith Chubb, Robert Fried and Robert Putnam). The literature on dark and gray networks offers a new scenario for the interpretation of the relationship between local politics and planning.

Furthermore, dissemination and exchange of research results in these subject areas should be accompanied by the analysis and understanding of changing institutional contexts, perhaps moving towards a federal model but also being increasing aware of localism, community empowerment and participation and the need for greater transparency in planning.

Certainly this is not a simple task that we are undertaking but we believe that this humble, passionate and enthusiastic project could make an important contribution to the spread of research on Italian planning, with mutual benefits for our international colleagues.

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FIGURE SOURCES

Figure 1 - *Urbanistica*, 30, 1990.

Figure 2 - *Urbanistica*, 12, 1953

Figure 3 - Marconi, P. (1936) (ed) *Atti Ufficiali del XIII Congresso Internazionale degli Architetti e degli Ingegneri*, Roma: Sindacato Nazionale Fascista degli Architetti e degli Ingegneri.

Figure 4 - *Urbanistica*, 12, 1953

Figure 5 – Camerini et al, (2000) *Storia Sociale Italiana: la vicenda della FILCA-CISL*. Ortona: Foto dell'archivio Storico Nazionale CISL.

Figure 6 – Clementi, A. and Perego, F. (1983) *La metropoli spontanea. Il caso di Roma 1925-1981*. Bari: Dedalo.